

The Intelligencer.

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JAMES E. WHARTON.

A Long Letter from a Veteran
Wheeling Editor.Some Interesting Reminiscences
of His Career in this City.

PORTSMOUTH, O., December 10.

I did not see your INTELLIGENCER during the Centennial year, nor do I suppose I shall at the next Centennial, for I am beginning to look back to the days of my old home, and find in my memory many incidents that amuse me and may some of your readers; but I begin to write of them I fear they may run too long.

Here are a few. Some of your readers may remember when the stages ran from Wheeling to Frederick, sometimes twenty a day each way, and half as many west. No one could go anywhere without going through Wheeling. Indeed, a stranger once stopping at a tavern in St. Clairsville, and asking the route to a vast number of places in various directions, was told to go to Wheeling and take the National road or river up or down. Getting irritated at the repetition, he asked, "If I wish to go to—h— which route shall I take?" "Well, Wheeling, I guess, is about the nearest route. (There was much gambling and other foolishness there in bygone days—your know.)

WHEELING FORTY YEARS AGO.

Although the city was not so large as it is now, yet it was more widely known then than now, when the rails and glass everywhere. Outside, the great "land Admiral," was the leading figure. He had no education, but he owned more acres than any other man in the country at one time. When he was about failing I took a bill of \$61 to him. He had nothing to pay with except a horse he would give me for it. He said the horse was plugging him and got him to kicking a little. I went to the stable and found him a lively looking creature. He took him and gave a receipt in full, taking him to McConnell's stable. I told Mr. Mc. he kicked some and he had better be careful. As I was going from him both heels went by my head with a whizz. I had been in my office but a few minutes when Mr. Mc. came running in, his hair standing up in all directions, and stammering out, "come and take that horse away or he will kick my stable down in an hour." I took him to Mr. McCourtney, who said he would cure him. He kept him for two weeks with his tail tied up by his hind legs, and legs scarce touched the floor, but when he let him down he made up for lost time. I offered him at auction, but the auctioneer dared not ride him. A reckless fellow offered to do it for a trifle, and I tried him twice; but having to keep at a distance from him, looking through a glass, he was not so much afraid. He was sold to Mr. McCourtney for \$15. His bill was \$10, and the other expenses were \$4.25, so I kept 75 cents, mostly cash.

JOHN M. CLARKE, THE LOTTERY DEALER.

John M. Clarke was the Lottery dealer for many years, and made a great deal of money at it; but he was too fond of all kinds of games and lost about as fast as he made it. I did a great deal of printing for him. One rainy day I was passing his office and he called me to come in. It was very dull and he wanted me to play a game with him; told him I did not know how. Why, you can play euchre? No! Old Sledge? No! Brag? No! Chess? No! What can you play, Charles? Well, I played a little at checkers when a boy. Well, let me beat you once. We played. He played according to Hoyle, as he said; but I beat him. You can't do that again. Beat him finally the third time. He jumped up and kicked over the board, exclaiming, "You have done it—d—d awkwardly, no man under heaven can beat you."

Clarke used to have Eastern exchange for sale, and one day I met his brother Albert, who came up to me very seedy and seriously, and asked earnestly if I could tell him where he could get some Eastern funds? I told him John M. probably had some. Well, can you tell me where I can get the Western to buy it with? It was the first time I had been sold in that way, and was too sore to laugh. Albert went to St. Francisco where he had a bank, and told him to bank there. He wrote home, "if you kill Wharton and open him you will find railroad iron enough to lay a track from Cumberland to Wheeling."

A HIGH WATER REMINISCENCE.

In the spring of 1831 I boarded at the old frame U. S. Hotel on Water street. The ice had broken up with a flood, and when the water was high, the ice and water were about four feet from the steps of the house. What trouble there was at such times in getting the passengers and mails across! Sometimes they were detained for days. Now, you have two bridges instead of our little ferry. Well, the night I was married I was out on a tramp, and thinking the river had suddenly risen into the house, moved my boots in a hurry; went down and it proved a skiff had come across from the Island with the letter mail and a passenger or two. I went to the open door and looked out. The scene was one of the grandest I ever looked on. The steamboats loomed up over us dark and grand as the spectres of the storm. The ice was frozen shore and against the bustle, and together with a harsh, hoarse sound, mingled with which the water was as they were driven on each other in their fierce march to their death field in the sunny south. Tall trees, with their roots were thrown upward, floating with a splash and groan as of the wounded spirit of the mighty waters, rearing up like a giant, while the water was as if it were a sea of fire, and the moon just struggling through a path-way in the eastern clouds, flew up toward the dark and sombre western skies.

AN ECCENTRIC CELEBRITY.

All these formed a scene that made me feel that we could "see God in the clouds and hear him in the wind." Just then a little weasel faced figure came sliding up to the door and exclaimed, "Welcome, heaven called down the depth of damnation upon the river and all that belonged to it. I looked at the register and there found him registered, Robert J. Walker, Mississippi Senator of the U. S. He called, then, to know if the stage was ready, as it was important that he should be in Washington. He had been appointed to fill a vacancy. On inquiry it was shown that he had arrived on the Island, and stormed and blustered until the guard and ferryman took a skiff to the upper end of the Island and scooped up the boat and rowed it toward the mouth of the creek. While coming over he was handling a purse of gold in his pocket; the boat careened and to save himself from falling he had suddenly drawn out his hand and threw the purse in the river. He offered a reward for it, but it was probably taken by the first man who found it. He was Secretary of the Treasury under Mr. Polk; afterwards went to Europe, spent all his money, joined in the project of the Texas Pacific railroad, resided in New York from 1850 to 1851, where he paid for his share by selling the stock of the road at a loss of one dollar. In 1853 he and Orestes of the Metropolitan Hotel, offered me

A MILLION OF THE STOCK

if I would advocate in my paper an appropriation by Congress for its benefit. I thought it too big a boon for so small a horse, and declined. Walker's letter on war finances in 1851 was one of considerable influence, because it was in opposition to New York stock jobbers. He went to Washington where he lived for a

year or two on ten cent meals, and there died.

The crossing of the river, after the bridge was erected, was considerably easier; but a poor ferry jumped from the first wharf, the river was in a rampage, went down between two cakes of ice, was thrown up and forward on a cake and floated near the track of Walker's skiff, being taken ashore at Ed's mill, very wet, cold and disgusted. If she is alive now she can say that she did what no other woman ever did or will do.

(Mr. W. is probably not posted as to later events of the same kind.—E. O. INTELL.)

WHEELING FINANCIALLY CONSIDERED.

Wheeling has grown in size and strength since those days, yet you have no great natural resources except coal, not even ordinary aid of railroads; yet you have had less failures and less trouble than any other city in the West, while in 1840, scarce a half dozen men in it escaped bankruptcy. You have men there, men who toil and collect resources and stand to their own business. The property in the Valley of the Creek must be getting valuable, and built up. Mrs. Gooding's and Mrs. Cruger's were about the only houses on the road, in olden days. One of the first advertisements I had in the Times was from a man who lived a little beyond the river, from front to back, and had a recommendation that his stable stood over the creek and the manure would run off without trouble. I suppose you have now about as good gardeners out there as anywhere.

THO'S. HORNBOOK'S PLACE.

We hear occasionally of Mr. T. Hornbrook's place as a very rich one, both for its real worth and for its singularity. I often hear it spoken of by those who have visited it. "One incident occurs to me of my first acquaintance with the proprietor. It was long ago, perhaps 1842 or 1843—when he and his brother removed their store from the steamer Merchant to Monroe street. I had been to the wheel very early one morning, and while passing their store on my return it began to rain. Mr. H. stood at the door, and cried: "Come in and get an umbrella!" It is going to rain hard." He hoisted a new umbrella. I thanked him, and went on thinking, that was very kind in an old man. That same night a good Christian. Above the McClure House corner, I saw a little girl holding up her sole article of dress, apparently, except a ragged shawl over her head, drenched with the falling torrent. The kindness I had received, perhaps, induced me to say: "Here, my girl, come and get an umbrella." She looked at me, a yellow, haggard face, with wondering eyes, and a cross, despairing, hating look, and kindled to a bright smile, as though it was the first kind word she had ever heard, as she came under. At the corner of Hamilton and Fifth a still smaller girl, going from the McClure House, had strayed from the crowd and stuck crying in the mud. The miserable wail darted from under the umbrella, brought the other from the mud to the pavement, went back and got the little shoes that had been washed there carefully out and put them on, while the little one brighter than the others, as the skies did, the short summer shower having passed off. The smallest one went to a house above Judge Caldwell's, on Hamilton—the wail away down Fifth, with a smile on her face, to which it was a stranger, as were the two girls. Mr. Hornbrook and his wife had done a power of good. I have known him well for nearly forty years since that morning, and can truly say I have never known a man who has done more acts of Christian kindness and human love.

AN IMPROVED YOUNG MAN.

Some of your readers, not many, will remember Mr. King, who came from Eastern Virginia with a large number of slaves to keep the Virginia Hotel. He had a son George, who put on many airs. He went to see a young Quakeress, whose father was a wealthy farmer of Belmont County. He rode a fine horse, and as he rode up a mulatto boy took his horse, and he went the evening of the night, displaying his pomposity, as he supposed, to the best advantage before the lady and her ancestors. On going away after breakfast he threw the mulatto a half dollar with a great flourish, which the old gentleman seeing sent the boy to take it back and tell him he had better keep it for he would need it. George did not get there any more, but the slaves were gradually sold and King was broke up. He wanted the half dollar sooner than he expected.

LITERATURE AND SCIENCE IN WHEELING.

Wheeling had a respectable bar and pulpit, but none of its members became noted abroad for either literary or scientific efforts. George McFerran was of no profession. He became somewhat noted as an antiquarian, but was too fond of fun to succeed well. A man named Teeters came there to teach some sort of a school. He was a swell and George determined to take him down. He endeavored to correspond with him as a young lady, and "Dear Sir," he wrote, "I am very foolishly after the fashion of Malvolio in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. George appointed him a meeting on the National road, as you go up the hill where he had a boy in girl's clothes, to whom he regularly offered his heart and hand, when a dozen young fellows jumped from the bushes and booed him home. He left Wheeling the next day, and McFerran went as clerk on a steamboat.

WHEELING CELEBRITIES.

Dr. Hurlburt was a national reputation as a Surgeon and writer upon that subject; but while I had not followed up the progress of the city in that respect, of late years, I venture to say that none of the children of Wheeling have acquired as high and general a reputation as a writer as Rebecca Harding (Mrs. Davis). Davis is not a sensationalist, either; but has written with a purpose and strength. Our families were for years neighbors and intimate. As a young lady she was not beautiful, graceful or fluent; but there was about her conversation strong sense and an evidence of reserved power, and a purpose and strength. One evening while walking to the academy, and over towards the then new Crescent mill. Both scenes were grand. From the hill you saw the city buried in its covert of smoke and fog with here and there a phosphenic light struggling upward, a bright streak of a burning trail, ever, reflecting the moon above it, while the winding river, all silver, flowed placidly past the dark western hills. It was a scene that would excite a deep imaginative mind like hers, and it did; but she never gushed or slumped over. Never Foster uttered a word of admiration, or even a compliment, but he was a kind of a secret admirer. Probably the only one of the kind on record. So it was when looking at the mill with its hundreds of gleaming oars on the night, and its hundreds of men stripped to the waist, wielding the great bars like so many bulwarks, and listening to the whirr of the wheels, the puff of steam, and the sound of the vast hammers as they mounded bars in shape. She said never a word; but there she drank the inspiration of "Life in the Iron Mills," and wrote truth in pictures. She has known record of such different scenes and written much of them, with a marked truthfulness, that makes her writings useful and will give them more prominence than those of most writers of the day.

THE STAG LINE.

had her jokes too numerous to mention. When a steamboat arrived the stage office was a good place to study character. Messrs. Bell, Acheson, Newman and Foster often amused the stage with their different characters. One illustration I quote as an illustration. Soon after the Mexican war closed, Gen. Shields, of Illinois, who had made a name, arrived in the same boat with Gen. Pillow, both going to Washington. The former was wrapped in a column of traveling letters in answer to the question "What name?" replied, "Shields." The other came up in full uniform and replied to the question as though he was issuing a command "Major General Gideon J. Pillow."

FIRST VISIT TO OUR HILLS.

Persons are much affected by their surroundings. The mountains, mountains and a gentleman who was born and

raised in Northwestern Ohio, where they

have no hills, he said he had never crossed the mountains or been east of Columbus until he had a family and carriage. He then started with them to the mountains, and after passing Zanesville he told him to conclude he was entering the mountains. On past Wheeling, Washington, Brownsville to Uniontown, they became higher and more of them. As he gave his reins to the young hotel he remarked, "Well, my boy, I suppose I am most over the mountains, aren't I?" "Well, yes," was the reply, "but there are some right smart rises ahead." When he had reached the top of Laurel Hill, the next morning he thought the boy had told a part of the truth.

A STAGE DRIVER WHO WAS NOT WANTED.

Mr. Sullivan, of Neill, Moore & Co. once gave a profane young scamp a good rebuke. He was Wheeling a few days, and the fellow came in the office, probably the worse for liquor, and asked for a place as a driver. "Can you drive a stage," said Mr. S. "Well, I can drive a stage plump into h—l." "As we have no lines running in that direction we don't want you." There were many of these anecdotes, some good, but I am running too long.

RIVER REMINISCENCES.

The river, too, had its jokes, by the hundreds, and some that were pretty good. Capt. Lodwick was long on the river. At Guyandotte he took on a passenger who was pronounced by the passengers to be a homely man living. The Captain said he had one on deck that was more than a match for him. From words they came to blows, when the Captain went down for his deck-hand, who was named Knight from "dark Monroe." He came up making hideous grimaces which he could do perfectly. "Stop that," exclaimed the Captain. "Come out as God made you. We will beat them any way." Would not all of us gain more by looking and acting naturally, than by affectation or making faces for the world?

Steamboats looked to me much larger and fiercer in those old days than they do now; but boatmen say they are much improved. Perhaps the assertion frequent on the lips of Mr. McLean, a portrait painter of Wheeling, long ago, is always true, that when young eyes are very wide open and gradually narrow day by day until they are shut in the last sleep. Hardly, however, is that true in all cases, for we can see many small things a long way behind us. To some, river travel is not pleasant; to me it is. You can converse on a boat—you can only talk on the cars. On the former you are free—on the latter only look, and never hear. I have seen many a beautiful river both of what nature has done and what man ought to do. The hundred and fifty millions of dollars sometimes lavished annually by our people in visiting Paris and the Rhine, if spent on this river would throw them so far in the shade that they would never be heard of again. Randall Brown, formerly a chandler of Wheeling, was a dry genius. Coming up with him on a boat from Cincinnati in 1847, he asked where I was the night before; said he had called at the hotel to see me. Told him I had spent the night at the observatory by invitation of Prof. Mitchell. "What did you see?" I described the moon, planets, fixed and double stars as they appear through the different lenses of the big telescope and told him that our attention was turned, under the highest power, to a luminous star that was so far beyond any other stars that it required fifty thousand years for the light to reach this earth. "How fast did you say light traveled?" said he. "Twelve million miles a minute." "Fifty thousand years! Je-r-u-s-a-lem; but this is a great country!"

A GENUINE WOMAN.

That night I was kept awake by a child crying. I went to the cabin and leaned my head on the table watching a sorrowful, sickly, despairing man in threadbare attire dandling the crier, which cried the more the more it was tossed. Soon the crier divided off the ladies' cabin was put aside and a lady stepped in, took the child and said kindly, "Let me take your baby, air." She sat down with it and the faint heaving breaths soon hushed the cry to a low, soft sob and then to rest. I recognized the lady as one of Wheeling's most wealthy and beloved young matrons, and watched her at a distance, not raising my head. The poor man told the worn old story of emigrating with his young wife from Maryland to Missouri, malarial sickness, a birth and death, failure of crop, and now on his weary way to get back to the old home, a sadder if not a wiser man. She listened with a patient feeling long while the little one slept. At length a child's cry came from the ladies' cabin. He rose to take the baby, saying, "Your child is crying for you." "Never mind," said she, "it will not hurt her, for she has a mother." The sweet smile with which she said it repaid me for loss of sleep. There was a lesson of life too, in the face of that care worn man when a day later he thanked humbly his friend and bade her farewell at Wheeling. She walked in the spirit of him who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me," I thought to write you more good jokes, but I thought of one upon anybody else than myself. I was afraid I would tread on some one's toes, and it is too late in the day to raise any unpleasantness in a place that seems as much like home as Wheeling. There is, however, one too good to be lost. A one extensive manufacturer, who has been years away from there, met me one evening going down to the wharf with carpet bag in hand, in 1846, a month or so after the long telegraph wire had been stretched across the river, and asked me where I was going. Dr. Fletcher replied, "I arrived there at seven in the morning, and very little purchases, and took the new and fast passenger steamer 'Telegraph' down and arrived home in twenty-four hours from the time we left. At the foot of Monroe street I met the same man going. He said, 'Why, I thought you went to Pittsburgh.' 'I did so,' I replied. 'How did you get back so quick?' 'Came by Telegraph.' He looked up at the wire and said earnestly, 'How do you blame things first anyhow?' I thought it a good joke, at first, but found that I thought to write you more good jokes, but I thought of one upon anybody else than myself. I was afraid I would tread on some one's toes, and it is too late in the day to raise any unpleasantness in a place that seems as much like home as Wheeling. There is, however, one too good to be lost. 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